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Local history. Vol. II

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HALF-CENTURY SERMON

ON

SOME CHANGES WHICH HAVE OCCURRED,

IN THE

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY IN NEW LONDON;

IN THIS CITY;

AND

IN THE COUNTY TO WHICH IT PERTAINS:

DELIVERED JANUARY 27TH, 1857,

AND PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY.

BY ABEL MCEWEN, D. D.,

SENIOR PASTOR OF THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH IN NEW LONDON;

ORDAINED OCTOBER 22D, 1806.

NEW LONDON: STARR & CO., PUBLISHERS.

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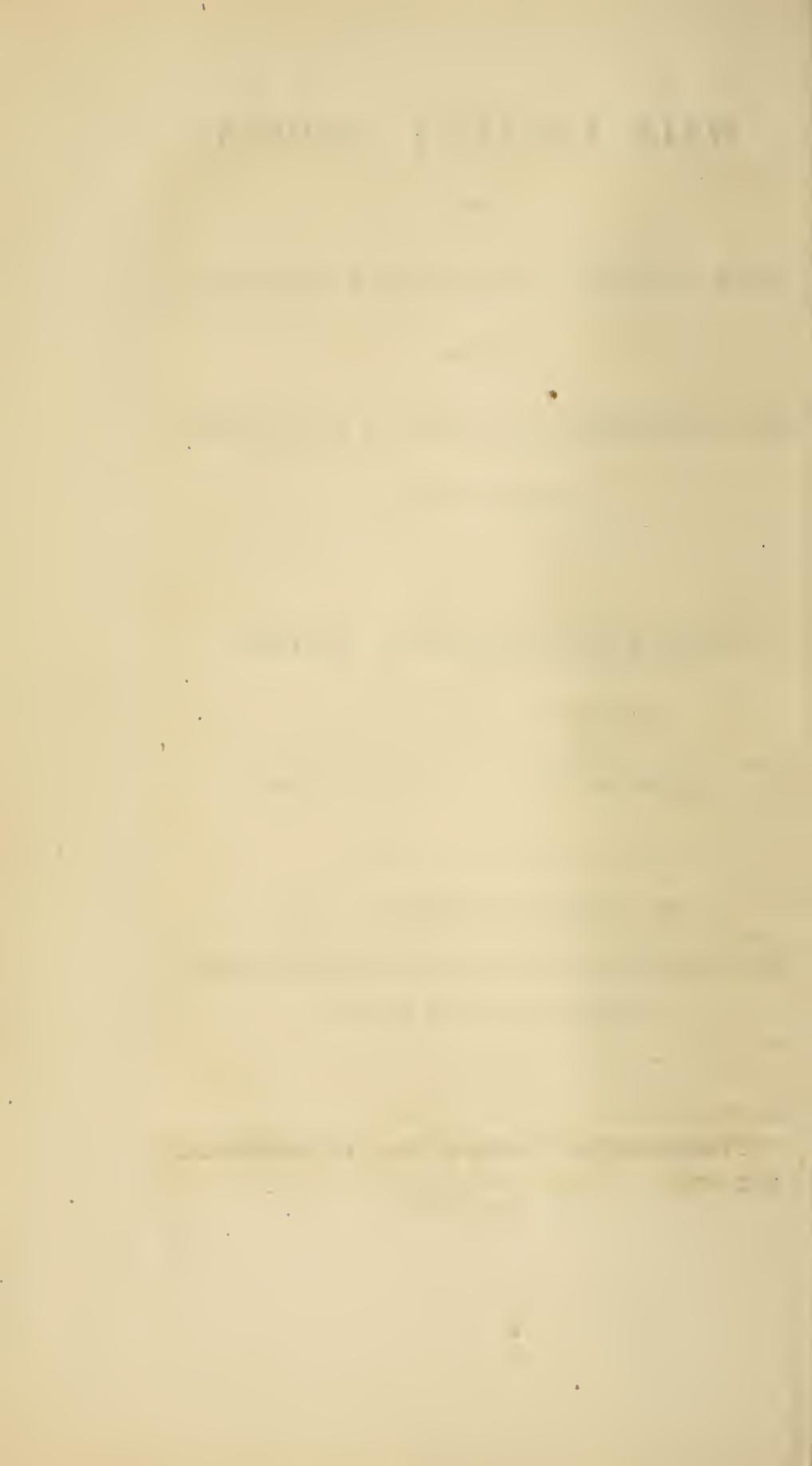
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S E R M O N.

ISAIAH LXI, 4.

And they shall build the old wastes ; they shall raise up the former desolations ; and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations.

The history of mankind is the history of progress ; of decline ; of local desolations ; but, on the whole, of improvement. Cities have been built, have become great, rich, populous ; and have passed away : empires have arisen and fallen ; and nations, sometimes predominant, have become small, feeble, and abject. A single nation, or empire, has often been subject to great fluctuations of prosperity and power. But now, after six thousand years of change ; the human family has more than it ever had, probably, in number ; certainly, in wealth, knowledge, and power.

The history of revealed religion corresponds, somewhat, with the history of the secular world.

Trace the Church of God, from the time it was given in charge to Abraham, until the coming of Christ; until this hour; how it has flourished and declined; rejoiced and suffered; trembled and triumphed! God has been in the midst of her; and, up to this time, her way has been onward.

Israel, the chosen nation, the peculiar people; from the day its progenitor set foot in Canaan, until this time, has had its full share of vicissitude. It is not my design, in commenting upon the text now presented to this congregation, to trace, at length, the history of the Jews. Isaiah looked upon the captivity of that people; upon the desolations of their country, of their cities and temple; the ruins of that greatness and glory, which gave immortality to the names of David and Solomon. When the first temple was dedicated, little did the nobles and yeomen of Israel imagine that their children should serve as captives, in a heathen country. A vision from God broke upon the prophet's mind; and he saw the return of the prisoners. "They," said he, "shall build the old wastes; they shall raise up the former desolations; and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations." The captives returned; and the prosperity of their nation was restored.

Whoever will examine the text, and the chapter containing it, will; if disciplined by the gospel; understand that the prophet spoke, not only of the

restoration of the Jews ; but that his prediction also foreshadowed the greater prosperity of revealed religion under him, to whom God said “ I have set thee to be a light to lighten the Gentiles ; that thou shouldest be for salvation to the ends of the earth.”

A wide subject opens before us ; but I speak not, this evening, of the wide spread of the gospel ; of the conversion of many nations to the christian faith ; of the reverses with which the church has met ; of the civilization, learning, riches and power, which are the gains of christianity ; nor of the attitude which it has now taken for extending the truth and grace of God over the world.

But, at the request of a few persons, who have lived here, under my ministry, for half a century, I have come in to speak of some of the *changes*, which have occurred in this parish ; in this city ; and in this county.

In the first discourse, preached in this house, some statistics were given of the membership of this church ; of the admissions into it, and of the work and results of divine grace, here administered. What was then said will not now be repeated ; but is mentioned, as apology for not introducing that ; but for what was then done ; might, now, be expected.

The Records of the First Church in New London, commenced in 1670 ; which was, probably, the time of the ordination of Mr. Bradstreet, as

pastor; though no record of that event has been preserved. This was twenty-five years after the settlement of the town commenced. He had been here four years previous to his ordination. Other men had preceded him here, as preachers: Mr. Blinman, who left here in 1658; and, afterwards, Mr. Gershom Buckley. No record shows that either of these men was pastor of the church; but in a letter, Mr. Blinman styles himself, "pastor of the Church of Christ in New London." Messrs. Saltonstall, Adams, Byles, Woodbridge, and Channing were, in succession, pastors of this church, from the ministry of Mr. Bradstreet, to the time of the present incumbents.

No records which characterized Mr. Bradstreet have reached us. Mr. Saltonstall, who was from Massachusetts, was a talented and dignified man. Out of the pastoral office, he was elected governor of the State. This event deserves notice here; because it indicates a great change in the political prejudices of Connecticut; and attests the early respectability of this church; and because Mr. Saltonstall, probably, will have in the gubernatorial office, no successor, elected from a pulpit in New London.

During the ministry of Mr. Saltonstall; and reaching down through the long ministry of Mr. Adams, and the shorter one of Mr. Byles, a religious sect prevailed here, whose action was very vexatious to this church and congregation. Dr.

Trumbull, Miss Caulkins, and perhaps some others, give us some historical items of the Rogerines. I have no ambition to give their history; except so far as their fanaticism operated as a persecution of our predecessors in this place of worship. This persecution constituted the major part of the religion of these fanatics. The Sabbath; the Congregational church, and its ministry and worship, were idols. This was the leading article of the faith of the Rogerines. Their grand mission was to destroy this idolatry. The obligation lay heavy upon their consciences; and the enterprise near their heart. To pay taxes of any sort wounded their soul. In common with Quakers, they held the doctrine of non-resistance to violence from men; and they out-quakered the Quakers, in their religious abhorrence of resistance to bodily disease of every kind. If one had the typhus fever, or the itch, he must let it take its natural course, without the slightest resort to medicine or remedy. This cutaneous disease brought some of them to the border of the grave. Messrs. Saltonstall and Adams were brave men, not intimidated by the insolence of the Rogerines. Mr. Byles was a man of less nerve; and he suffered, not a little, from their annoyance. They waylaid him, in his walks to the place of public worship; and he was actually afraid to go without an escort, lest he should suffer indignities from them.

Among the idols, which it was the mission of

these fanatics to demolish, was the Congregational ceremony of marriage. One of their sturdy zealots, a widower of middle age, announced his intention to take, for his wife, without any formality of marriage, a widow in the neighborhood. This our scrupulous forefathers regarded, if it should be done, as the profanation of a religious rite, and a transgression of civil law. Mr. Saltonstall remonstrated against the design of the man; but he stoutly maintained and declared his purpose. The clergyman, seeing him enter the house of his intended, also went in that he might see them together. "You, sir," said he to the man, "will not disgrace yourself and the neighborhood, by taking this woman for your wife, without marriage?" "Yes," he replied, "I will." "But you, madam," said the wily watchman, "will not consent to become his wife, in this improper manner?" "Yes," said she, "I do." "Then," said he, "I pronounce you husband and wife; and I shall record your marriage in the records of the church."

One of this sect, who was employed to pave the gutters of the streets, prepared himself with piles of small stones, by the way-side, that when Mr. Adams was passing to church, he might dash them into the slough, to soil the minister's black dress. But getting no attention from the object of his rudeness, who simply turned to avoid the splash; the nonplussed persecutor cried out, "Wo to thee, Theophilus, Theophilus, when all men speak well

of thee." The reply was: "I have no fear; your insolence will save me from that curse."

The idol, which most grievously offended the conscience of these purifiers of religion; and which called forth their most general and fierce assault, was the public worship of the Congregationalists, on the Sabbath. They came, men and women, into the aisles of the meetinghouse, with their cards and spinning-wheels; their sewing and knitting works; and with implements for working in wood; and during prayers and sermon, plied their several occupations. The disturbance made was a breach of law: police officers took them out. They were careful to make no resistance; showing their faith by their works. A constable often took out a lusty man; and, with a twine, tied him, by the arm, to a tree. He was studious not to break the ligature; but stood, conscientiously, until the close of divine service, when he was officially released. One constable displayed his genius in putting the strength of this principle of non-resistance to a test. He took a bold assailant of public worship down to the harbor; placed him in a boat, which was moored to a stake in deep water; perforated the bottom of the boat with an auger; gave the man a dish, and left him, to live by faith; or to die in the faith. "Skin for skin; all that a man hath will he give for his life." The faith of the martyr was strong; yet he was saved, not by faith, but by bailing water.

For such offences, these people were tried before the County Court; the elder Gov. Griswold being States-attorney for the prosecution. But these civil prosecutions abated not the zeal, nor checked the depredations of these fanatics. Their goods were distrained; their cattle were sold at the post; and some of their people were imprisoned. But emulating the example of the Apostles, they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods; yea they gloried in bonds and imprisonment. I have not yet spoken of scourging; nor of the effect of it; which, in the consummation of judgments, actually befel these crusaders against idolatry. What the law would not do, in that it was weak, lynching did. Historical fidelity constrains me; though with reluctance and sadness, to say; that our forefathers of this congregation, in the extremity of their embarrassment, took the disturbers of public worship out, tied them to trees, and permitted the boys to give them a severe whippiug, with switch-es, taken from the prim bush. The affirmation of the Rogerines is, that the shrub has never vegetated in this town, since that irreligious and cruel use of it. It is to be feared that the moral effect upon the boys was worse than the blasting effect upon the prim hedge. But our fathers had not the Sabbath School; nor that mighty public sentiment, which, pervading the whole social mass, now withholds effectually, the coarsest and most ignorant of the population, from every indecorous invasion of divine worship.

The Rogerines have dwindled to insignificance. A small remnant of their posterity, almost unknown, exists in an adjacent town, with hardly a relic of their earth-born religion. But why; you may be ready to ask; rake from oblivion a sect, devised for nothing but to destroy the religion of the gospel; and destined to vanish away? Our answer is; to confirm our faith in the Almighty Saviour, who said, "every plant which my Heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up;" and to mark that impressive *change* in the population of this place; which, this day, and every day, we, with joy and thanksgiving, are to observe; and are to ascribe; under God, to the elevating and purifying influence of education, and of the gospel, freely used. Men and women of low minds; in regions of darkness; now invent religions, to subvert that religion which God has revealed. Mormonism might venture hither now: it would find few or no materials; and not any patronage for its proselyting mission. It's apostles must confine their gleanings mainly to the dark purlieus of Europe; and take their benighted and demoralized victims to their den of Sodom, beyond the Rocky Mountains. Spiritualists have hovered around us a little; but have found hardly a dry limb, or a bare rock to light upon. Few, and far between, individuals, of weak nerve, and unbalanced mind, may have given to the bare-faced imposition, a slender and short-lived adhesion. But

they have soon found that public sentiment extends to them, only rebuke and pity ; and that the population here is not a soil, in which, they, or their religion can take root.

Sixty-seven years ago, a very extraordinary event occurred in this church. It had in its book of records, a confession of faith ; which all its living and all its antecedent members had made. For substance of doctrine, it was the same as the confession now in use. At that time, the pastor cut it out of the book ; and inserted a Unitarian creed ; and, without asking, or receiving, the consent of the church, used that, in the admission of members, for the next seventeen subsequent years. In the second year of my ministry, a leading member of the church presented to me a copy of the old confession ; stating that the confession then on the records, had never been adopted by the church ; and that the one which had been abstracted, had never been renounced, nor relinquished by the church ; adding still further ; that a desire was prevalent in the church, that it's own confession should be restored to practical use ; and to it's rightful position on the record. The result was, that the ancient record was put into modern phrase ; was heartily adopted by the church ; and that it still remains it's confession of faith. In the review of these transactions ; the present generation will, probably, congratulate themselves, on their gain of religious liberty and ecclesiastical in-

dependence. Unitarians sport the honor of liberality. This church is conservative of it's right to confess it's own faith. Congratulations are, on this occasion, offered to it; for the preservation of it's people from Unitarianism, during a ministry of seventeen years; as, by careful observation for fifty years immediately succeeding that period, none of the errors of that religious system have been discovered in this congregation.

During this half-century, the habits of the people of this place have greatly changed. Whether all the changes have been improvements, is a question too difficult to be solved in the present discourse. The Sabbath is conceived to be less profaned, in the latter years, than it was in the first part of that period. Then, this congregation and that of the Episcopalians, were the only people who sustained regular public worship on the Sabbath. Two other places for preaching the gospel had been opened: one for the Methodists; and one for the Baptists. But the ministrations, in these two places, were inconstant; congregations of competent size and stability not having yet been gathered. A large division of the population were not attached to any institution of worship; and they slightly; if, at all; regarded the sanctity of the Sabbath. They were seen much in the markets; in the streets; on the wharves and water; in the fields; but not in the house of God. A different spectacle is presented now; which has

been unfolding in the latter years. A puritan observer sees little out of doors, of labor, of strolling, riding, lounging, or other amusement; during the sacred hours; which he could report abroad, to the disgrace of the town. Especially during the hours of divine service, the streets are delightfully desolate. To what are we indebted, for a *change*, so difficult to be effected by the ministry of the word; and, by other ordinary measures for such reformation? The population of the place is three-fold greater than it was when the Sabbath was more profaned. But our worshiping assemblies have multiplied more than the population. Instead of two, we now number ten; and these clustered near together. To institute these ten assemblies; and to sustain them, in competent size and strength; the projectors and guardians have gone out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and have brought in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. This has been done, and yet there was room. Fear and feebleness; zeal and benevolence, from the porches for worship, again uttered their voice; go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in; that our houses may be filled. Some observers are confounded and scandalized that the exalted Prince and Saviour should permit His church to be sectarianized into so many rival divisions. But who does not see that, thereby, He causeth the wrath of man to praise the Lord? He

who knoweth what is in man, understands better than we do ; that, if the tastes and prejudices of some perishing sinners will not suffer them to worship Him, in some associations ; these passions may be made incentives to them, to seek His grace, in other combinations, and in other forms of worship.

Not only have the urgent wants of new and feeble congregations operated to diminish the desecrations of the Sabbath ; but peculiarities, in the secular business of this city, have saved us from the influence of habits, which, in some other towns, have sprung up, to disturb and to disorder the day of rest. Few young men and women seek and find business here ; compared with the young, who get employment, in towns and villages of retail and manufacturing business ; who, having homes and kindred in the surrounding country ; fall into the corrupt habit of desecrating public worship, to ride, and visit relations and natal localities, during hallowed hours. In some towns in this and other counties, the Sabbaths is reported to be the harvest-day for the livery stables. These institutions are said to be, in those towns, the successors of grog-shops, in eating up the sins of the people.

At the commencement of my ministry in this place, little of family religion could be found. Households, at their meals, sat down to eat, and rose up to play. Few children or domestics heard the head of their house ask a blessing, or give

thanks, at their table. So far as careful inquiry can be relied on for the knowledge of facts ; in but two families in this whole congregation, was daily family prayer maintained ; though prayer, Saturday evenings, was, every week, offered by one other householder, at the head of his family. Probably, in two other houses ; perhaps in three ; belonging to two other religious denominations, family prayer was, by laymen, daily offered. One good man of our order ; when questioned concerning his observance of this dnty ; said that he had taken off his coat, and that he could not put it on. He, however, did put it on. He became a deacon of this church ; his house became a bethel ; in his family, and in the more public assembly, he prayed ; until he entered into the ceaseless worship of the family of the redeemed on high. With emotion we look back upon the habits of households here, at that time. How had they degenerated from the usages of their Puritan fathers ! How they dwelt in the presence of Him, to whom a prophet said, “pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not upon thy name !” May we not speak of a *change* ? Of a great, a pleasant change, in the family devotions of this congregation ; and of our neighbors about us ? Has not the fire been rekindled upon many a desolate altar ? Could not a cloud of witnesses be called up to testify, with humility and joy, that the incence of daily prayer

is offered, in the families to which they pertain?

Saturday evening was, by people of the Puritan stock, regarded as a part of the Sabbath; and those of them, who inherited the faith and spirit of their ancestors, strictly hallowed it. But that evening was the season of a weekly banquet, which gave much of character to the people of this place. The married and the unmarried; almost all the respectable men of the city; the wealthy, the enterprising, the ambitious, the educated, the literary, the professional, magistrates and their constituents were; the deeply religious excepted; constant attendants upon the festival of the tripe-club. It was instituted and maintained, ostensibly, for the benefit of it's host, a respectable old gentleman, to whom the emolument of the business was a convenience; but in reality, for sensual gratification, at the table, in viands and liquors; for social entertainment, such as it was; and, more than all, for the privilege of gambling; in which almost the whole fraternity participated, well nigh to the dawning of the day. This was the preparation season for the Sabbath; not of the Jews; but of those who wore the seal of christian baptism; and who belonged to christian assemblies. When the character and magnitude of this festivity were fully ascertained, a public discourse was given, on the sanctity and duties of Saturday evening, for the special benefit of the club. It's members availed themselves fully of the admonition and counsel ad-

ministered ; for they suddenly forsook and demolished the festival. For the encouragement of those who are called to preach the gospel, where evil practices abound, it may be said ; the experiment just detailed, taught, at least one minister ; that, for the acquisition of influence and popularity, no action promises more success, than a judicious, but determined assault upon the prominent vices of a place. On this occasion we speak of *changes*, which have occurred. It is not for a man of my age and associations to say, that nothing, at this time, can here be found ; which bears a diminutive resemblance to the tripe club of 1806. Without incurring the charge of senility, it may be said ; that if young men, or older men now let themselves down into habits of gambling and debauchery ; they are constrained to do it, under a covert which will hide them from public observation. The conscience, the intelligence and independence of the people of this place will withhold from those, who indulge in such practices, all confidence, and all respect.

A few of the oldest inhabitants of New London have witnessed a *change* in other religious usages of the place. Time was, when, with the exception of two services on the Sabbath ; and the Lecture, then once in three months, preparatory to the eucharist ; public religious meetings were not prevalent here. However much they would have been welcomed and enjoyed by some indi-

viduals; public sentiment, outrightly and contemptuously expressed, was against them. Night-meetings were denounced, as panders to debauchery. Prejudices against such assemblages for prayer and religious counsel, were so cherished, and became so deeply seated in some minds; that death, if nothing afterwards, was requisite to eradicate them. In the summer of 1807, a religious sensibility was manifest in a large portion of the congregation connected with this church. People, in large numbers, gathered, at dwelling houses, for prayer and religious instruction. The house for such meetings had not, then, been built. A young man, with his young wife, was seen, in the twilight, on his way to one of these strange assemblies. A company of respectable men were standing on the street. One of them, with affected simplicity, inquired where the couple could be going? The reply was, "to an evening meeting." "That," said the inquirer, "is too bad: when a new minister is settled; especially, if he be a young man; it is to be expected that the women; and especially that the young women, will importune him for many services; but to see a respectable young *man*, going to an evening meeting, is an outrage." That such a sentiment should have found place here, is neither unaccountable, nor incredible. For the nineteen preceding years, the pastor of this church had very little intercourse with the other ministers of the county, or the State. The

people here knew very little of ministers, other than their own; or of the religious usages of other churches. The gospel from abroad exerted almost no influence upon this population. One point of honor with them was, to treat their own minister with respect. If he, in a public discourse, assailed vices and errors; he was sometimes civilly told that, though they might not accord with him, in sentiment; they were pleased to have things done well: a compliment, such as it was; but evidence of a doubtful effect of the ministration. It is unnecessary to contrast the sentiment and habit of the present generation with what their fathers felt and did. Religious meetings, on the secular evenings of the week, now abound in congregations of every name. A peal from all the bells in town is often heard; but no person regards it as a fire-alarm; whereas, a remonstrance was once served upon me, against this style of notice for a public meeting; lest it should be productive of this distressing effect.

No note is, on this occasion, taken of the presence of the Sabbath School; nor of the absence of liquor from the occasional call, and from the social or festive party, making impressive contrasts in the treatment of children, and, in the hospitality of families; between the present time, and the earlier period. These are changes which have everywhere occurred: whereas we now speak of *changes* peculiar to this parish, and to this city, which have

been witnessed during the last half century. More of this sort might be mentioned.

But the passing of the hour hastens me to a brief detail of *changes* connected with my ministry in this county.

Every clerical association in this State; that of New London County excepted; had, since 1708, a consociation of churches, connected with it. With the exception of two or three churches on the western line of the county, which, many years ago, connected themselves with a consociation west of them; and two churches in Lebanon; which, until a few years past, belonged to Windham County; the churches of this county were never consociated until 1814. The pastors often proposed such a connection; but one pastor, with whom the old people now in this assembly were well acquainted; and one layman in Stonington, invariably met the proposition with the monitory cry, "hierarchy!" not understanding; or not admitting, that the design and effect of consociation are, to raise up a barrier to protect the churches from any hurtful domination of the ministry over them, and from the incursion of heresy from abroad.

The two uncompromising conservators of independency passed off the stage; and in 1814, a convention of pastors and of lay delegates from the churches was called; which formed and adopted a constitution for a consociation of the churches. All the churches; one excepted; then existing

within the bounds of the association, came cordially into the connection. Eleven churches, since that date, have been instituted in the county ; six of which have consociated themselves with the body : five of the eleven, more recently gathered, have not connected themselves with the consociation ; though one of the five has declared it's intention of doing it. One Separatist church, of the straitest sect, knocked at the door of the consociation, and was admitted ; and, afterwards, merged itself in another Congregational church, which was already consociated. In the annual meetings of this body, reports on the benevolent enterprises of the country are made ; and these topics are canvassed with deep interest, and great advantage. Beside the closer union and fellowship of the churches ; and the mutual aid which they render each other ; which are benefits derived from this consociation ; it has conformed us to the commonwealth of the churches in the State. New London County now comes up, and takes her rank among the tribes, in the sisterhood of Connecticut.

When I united with the association of this county, it numbered but eleven members ; and two of them were pastors of churches out of the county. The number of it's members is now thirty ; six of whom are non-residents : but as an offset to the non-residents, ten ministers are now performing service in the county, who have not yet connected themselves with the association. During my min-

istry here, seventy pastors, in the county, have been removed from their charges ; fifty-five by dismission ; and fifteen by death. Within this period, eleven new churches have been instituted on this ground ; one of which has been dissolved. The ministerial age of the members of this association is, in the aggregate, greater than that of any other association in the State.

From the commencement of my residence here, until the present time, a monthly meeting of ministers has been sustained for devotional services ; and for the discussion of a great variety of subjects. In the exercises of this meeting, its members have taken a deep interest ; and from them, they have, it is believed, derived great improvement, and a rich and pleasant harmony. One minister may be found, who has written for the meeting more than four hundred dissertations.

One *change* in the county, surpassing all others, in magnitude and interest, remains to be mentioned. When I was ordained here in 1806 ; I was the only pastor of a Congregational church, on a territory in Connecticut, of fifty miles in length, by twelve in width. Eleven large contiguous parishes, stretching from Sterling to the sea-board on the line of Rhode Island ; thence to the western boundery of East Lyme ; thence northward to the southern line of Colchester, were, except New London, destitute of Congregational ministers. Sterling and Voluntown belonged to Windham Coun-

ty; the other nine parishes were within our precinct. What rendered this desolation deeply afflictive and appalling was; no prospect, nor hope existed, that any of the parishes; Stonington excepted; would spontaneously and unaided, obtain a settled minister. In 1808, the Rev. Ira Hart took charge of the church in Stonington; and in 1811, the Rev. Timothy Tuttle became the pastor of the church in Groton, and of the church in North Groton; an event better than our hope. In all the residue of the wide waste, nothing indicated resuscitation or improvement. Wealth enough there was; people enough there were; a meeting house stood in every parish; but men of energy, influence, and device, to step forth and regain the ministry, were not to be found. Preaching of many kinds, other than Congregational; much of it transient and irregular; swept over the region. This awful desolation was the result of the fanatical ministry of Davenport and his coadjutors; who invaded these churches, seventy years before. From churches, whose pastors then withstood the operations of these fanatics, secessions occurred, of people, who formed themselves into churches; which took for themselves the appellation, Separates. When the pastors of the churches, which were by secessions, enfeebled, died; their parishes became; and they remained, vacant. The few pastors, who were, at length established on the outposts of this waste, were im-

patient of this rapid and constant degeneracy toward a state of heathenism, in a land of christianity. At the old parsonage of this parish ; one evening, in 1815 ; the Rev. Ira Hart and myself conversed on the subject ; and formed a project for a county missionary society, to restore the dilapidated churches and societies. The project, after a few weeks, was referred to the association ; who, after consultation ; resolved to forward a petition to the General Association of the State, soon to meet at Farmington ; that a Home Missionary Society might be instituted, for repairing the waste places of Connecticut and it's vicinity. The proposition was quickly and heartily embraced ; and, in the course of the ensuing year, such a society was established, the first of this kind in the United States. In the course of that year, some young men in New York, instituted a Home Society, to aid the destitute places of their own State. This society of the young men became the nucleus of the American Home Missionary Society ; to which the Home Missionary Societies, soon instituted in all the New England States, became auxiliary. Of the grand and salutary operations of this general society, aided by strength from Presbyterial regions, it is not the province of this occasion to speak. From calamities and local degradations, great religious enterprises are often originated. From the lamented desolation in New London County, originated a work, which has spread ; and

which is still to spread it's splendor over this broad country. This event will be an item in the history of New London County.

Our share in the results of this great work, realized, in the reclamation of the waste places in the county, to church order, and a stable ministry; should not be passed by without notice.

In 1816, missionaries were sent forth into our paralyzed parishes; and the gospel's voice began to sound in houses of public worship, which, for a long time, had been but occasionally opened; or, opened only for lay services. The people, by their attendance, and their pecuniary cooperation, responded to the public charity, beyond our hopes. The superintendence was somewhat arduous and critical; but remuneration was found in success; and, somewhat, in amusement. Missionaries of the right sort, could not be found, without exertion and fear. The chaplain of the House of Representatives in Congress, now ninety-four years old; labored to gather the scattered sheep into, at least, three of our broken-down folds. A young man; whose qualities were power and energy; rather than discretion; was dispatched to labor in a feeble congregation. After three weeks of hearing, one of the leading parishioners called on the superintendent of missions, who enquired of the visitor, what, probably, would be the result of the young

man's labors? "Oh," he replied, "he has stirred up all the young people; we shall be obliged to settle a minister: but, sir, he won't do." "Why not?" he was asked. "Why, sir," said he, "he is a despot sudden man!"

On the whole, not so much as was apprehended of labor and embarrassment, was realized, in the restoration of all these lapsed parishes; one excepted; to order, strength, and the re-settlement of the permanent ministry. The re-established societies all persevere in their new life; save one, which relapsed into a waste; the main members of which, and the members of one other society, which was not brought to life, have betaken themselves to assemblies for worship, in adjacent societies. Several of the restored societies have become strong and cultivated, and they inspire confidence that they will be permanent. Their aspect when; at the beginning; their restoration was undertaken; was forbidding. Groton had been vacant thirteen years; Ledyard, thirty-nine; East Lyme, sixty-two; North Stonington, sixty-four; Salem, seventy-four; and Chesterfield, which proved an abortion; had, from its origin, been without a settled minister; and it's meeting house, seventy years old, had rotted down. In that house, Dr. Trumbull, the historian of Connecticut, preached, when he was a licentiate.

The condition of the county is now good. For

strength of ecclesiastical societies; for numbers, order, and soundness of faith in the churches; for alacrity in the re-settlement of the ministry, when vacancies occur; and for ministers, competent to their work, and devoted to their business, in their own fields of labor; rather than ambitious of celebrated action, in discursive and more public fêtes; New London County would not now suffer from a comparison with other counties of Connecticut.

Shall we not bless God for his goodness in the past; and, for the present and the future, have we not occasion to say to Him, "Thou wilt arise, and have mercy upon Zion; for the time to favor her, even the set time is come; for thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favor the dust thereof."

Fifty years, my privilege has been to stand here, and witness events, as they have occurred. The greatest *change* in this city, and in the county, has been a change of hearts, manifested by subsequent professions of religion, and in lives of order, righteousness and benevolence. Every external improvement, compared with this, sinks into insignificance. Place a human being, young or old, in the best congregation; under the best ministry; amidst a population, with the most strict and decorous morality; unrenewed by divine grace, what is he? An immortal probationer; his breath in his nostrils, going into eternity, with a wicked heart; a condemned transgressor, drawing near to the

bar of Christ, with nothing to secure him from the pains and dishonor of everlasting punishment. Believers will go from this assembly ; from the theatre of grace and privilege, which we have surveyed, to be with Christ, and to behold His glory. His bishopric is the world. A mission of truth and grace, he, by men and angels, has been executing, for six thousand years, and will execute to the end of time. The waste places of earth ; the desolations of many generations he will repair. His ransomed he will bring home to the great jubilee of the redeemed. Then, he who is infinite ; whose name is wisdom, power, and love, will see of the travail of his sonl, and be satisfied. We, brethren and friends, who, in faith, have walked this pilgrimage together, shall soon die : when we awake in His likeness ; we too shall be satisfied.

